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DE RUEHVEN #0268/01 3111407

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FM USMISSION USOSCE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6021

INFO RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY IN EUROPE COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 USOSCE 000268

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2018

TAGS: OSCE PGOV PREL

SUBJECT: HELSINKI MINISTERIAL THE FOCUS OF EUR PDAS RIES,
VISIT TO THE OSCE

Classified By: Ambassador J. Finley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (C) The OSCE Secretary General, the Chairman-in-Office, and several PermReps told visiting EUR PDAS Marcie Ries November 3-4 that the OSCE faced new challenges, and expressed frustration at the organization's inability to take action on key issues, including additional military monitoring officers for Georgia and extra-budgetary projects in Afghanistan. With the Helsinki Ministerial approaching, current prospects for success were considered low, underscoring the importance of American leadership, including the participation of Secretary Rice. Interlocutors also expressed concern about Russia's obstructionist role, noting Russia seemed intent on undermining fundamental OSCE commitments; their concerns appeared well founded, as Russian PermRep Azimov expressed Russia's interest in "refreshing" previously agreed documents and underscored Russia's desire to discuss the future of European security. PDAS Ries acknowledged the OSCE faced challenges, but argued the organization provided a valuable forum for dialogue; its membership made it the only European security organization at which Russia and others had seats at the table as equals. In an era when Russia likely would continue to assert its weight in a negative way, she stressed the importance of patient contacts and close coordination among the Quad, the EU, and NATO. End Summary.

OSCE Secretary General

¶12. (C) OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut and PDAS Ries discussed Russian attitudes toward the OSCE and reviewed likely obstacles ahead of the December 4-5 Helsinki Ministerial, including how to handle Georgia. The SG provided a brief read-out of his recent visit to Moscow, where he insisted Russia would be unable to avoid some Ministerial focus on Georgia. The SG underlined the apparent Russian interest in revisiting certain principles of European security, while also noting French President Sarkozy's belief that any summit outcome should be anchored in existing OSCE structures and commitments. He called Russian FM Lavrov "the great inventor of chaos" and said he felt Russia was prepared to question the basis of all OSCE institutions. On the two U.S.-backed OSCE border assistance projects for Afghanistan effectively scuttled this year by the Russians, the SG suggested some Russian willingness to revisit them next year.

CPC Director

¶13. (SBU) Ambassador Herbert Salber, Director of the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), outlined prospects for progress on several regional conflicts, noting prospects for genuine progress in Nagorno-Karabakh (to counterbalance a likely stalemate on OSCE activities in Georgia) appeared more likely than in Transnistria. He also detailed the major work and accomplishments of a number of OSCE field missions,

remarking that the Croatia Mission might be ready to close by the end of next year, and noting that police reform had stalled in Bosnia, while emphasizing that election monitoring capabilities remained crucial for Albania. The key added value of the CPC, Salber said, was to provide OSCE participating States with impartial information about certain regions to enable a thorough and comprehensive debate and to support the work of the field missions.

Broad Discussions on OSCE Advantages

¶4. (SBU) In a meeting with the NATO Caucus, several EU PermReps commented that the OSCE still had a vital role to play on human rights, early warning, conflict prevention, and crisis management. The quick response to the conflict in Georgia, in the middle of a European summer break, was evidence of this, they said. UK PermRep Cliff said Georgia had given the OSCE a slightly higher profile, and added he thought participating States undervalued the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. Several PermReps also asked how the OSCE should work with a resurgent Russia, adding that the OSCE's answer to that question would have a significant impact on its future success.

¶5. (SBU) At a gathering of key PermReps, including the Chairmen-in-Office for 2008-2010, interlocutors emphasized that the OSCE provides a useful forum for dialogue, despite recent difficulties with Russia. While the consensus-based decision-making mechanism at times limits action, Finnish PermRep Turunen remarked, the organization remains flexible, as demonstrated by its quick deployment of military

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SUBJECT: HELSINKI MINISTERIAL THE FOCUS OF EUR PDAS RIES, VISIT TO TH%u\$Q:1HG=KQound, and declared they would counter any attempt by Russia to undermine basic commitments. UK Deputy PermRep Cole questioned Russia's evident desire to weaken the organization, noting Russia should have some incentive to work within the body, as it saved Russia from political isolation and was the sole organization in which Russia had an equal voice in the business of the security of Europe. He and others agreed they were unsure what Russia hoped to gain from President Medvedev's proposed new security architecture, and said they were unconvinced Russia had a clear goal in mind. Still, the Swedish, Kazakh, Greek, and Dutch PermReps were eager for a debate on European security at Helsinki and warm to the proposal of a future summit. Turkey cautioned that summit preparations are complicated and all-consuming, and suggested all delegations needed to think through what they hoped to achieve with greater clarity before cavalierly setting up a summit. All agreed the OSCE faces new challenges, and would have to respond with renewed energy.

Chairman-in-Office Meeting

¶6. (SBU) In a November 4 meeting with the Chairman-in-Office, Finnish PermRep Turunen highlighted a draft Ministerial decision honoring the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, but admitted much about the Ministerial remained uncertain, as the Chairman-in-Office had yet to finalize its approach to a possible political declaration and expected Ministerial discussions on Georgia and broader European security issues. Turunen mentioned "the future of security structures in Europe" had emerged as a possible theme for the Ministerial's December 4 working lunch; PDAS Ries objected to any implication the USG was open to re-thinking existing structures, and suggested avoiding any suggestion we were willing to rethink architecture. Turunen said he would consider it, noting security questions and Georgia (including the renewal of the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia) likely would be key topics of discussion.

Turunen urged Secretary Rice to join the 24 other Foreign Ministers who had already confirmed their participation in the Helsinki Ministerial; many, he said, would stay for

dinner December 4, although it would not be a working event. PDAS Ries promised to convey the Finns' desire for the Secretary's participation and encouraged the Chairman-in-Office to work closely with the United States, the EU, and others to prepare for the Ministerial.

Russian PermRep

¶ 7. (SBU) In a subsequent meeting, Russian PermRep Azimov told PDAS Ries a political declaration remained Russia's "main priority" for the Ministerial) and could perhaps clear the way for discussions on "modernizing" existing European security structures) but said any reference to regional conflicts would make consensus difficult. Azimov said he believed the Chairman-in-Office had prepared a draft declaration and expected Finnish Foreign Minister Stubb to discuss it during an upcoming trip to Moscow. He added Russia remained optimistic about the chances of reaching consensus on regional statements on Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh if new developments made them worthwhile, and said Russia remained committed to finding peaceful resolutions to the conflicts. According to Azimov, Russia had repeatedly told Moldovan and Transnistrian officials that Georgia and Kosovo were not precedents; Russia would not support secessionist movements and would seek a solution respecting Moldova's territorial integrity.

¶ 8. (SBU) Turning to Georgia, Azimov claimed South Ossetian authorities were willing to discuss their relationship with the OSCE and had expressed interest in an OSCE office in Tskhinvali; he added authorities were also willing to discuss access to South Ossetia for the eight original OSCE monitors.

Azimov acknowledged discussions on the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia would be difficult, and withheld speculation on possible solutions. On security issues, Azimov said Russia had an interest in "refreshing" previously agreed documents, including the Helsinki Final Act. According to Azimov, existing commitments had failed in Kosovo, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia, where territorial integrity had given way to self-determination. PDAS Ries responded by expressing strong support for the OSCE and its founding principles, noting the need for states to meet existing obligations, and arguing existing institutions remained sound; she suggested it was certain States' failure to work within existing organizations that created problems. She told Azimov she hoped Russia would exhibit flexibility in discussions on the political declaration and other issues,

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including the Afghanistan package and the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, and encouraged Russia to adopt a constructive approach to negotiations.

¶ 9. (U) PDAS Ries has cleared this cable.
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